

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2518

USIAC

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJ: MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN ADDIS

1. FOR MORE THAN TWO WEEKS NOW, USIS HAD BEEN BESIEGED BY THE LARGE AMERICAN PRESS CORPS WHICH IS ON THE SCENE TO COVER POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA. ALSO CALLING REGULARLY AT THE POST ARE SEVERAL STAFFERS OF PROMINENT FOREIGN JOURNALS.
2. FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, THE IEG MINISTRY OF INFORMATION HAS PRACTICALLY CEASED TO FUNCTION.
3. THERE IS NO ETHIOPIAN SPOKESMAN TO BRIEF JOURNALISTS ON DAILY EVENTS, AND EVEN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF MAJOR SPEECHES BY THE EMPEROR AND THE NEW PRIME MININSTER ARE HARD TO COME BY.
4. SINCE THERE IS NO MINISTER OF INFORMATION, EVERYONE, INCLUDING OUR CLOSEST CONTACTS, ARE AFRAID TO COMMENT ON THE SITUATION, ESPECIALLY TO FOREIGN PRESS MEMBERS.
5. USIS HAS, THEREFORE, BECOME THE HUB OF PRESS ACTIVITY WITH JOURNALISTS CALLING AT OUR OFFICES IN AN ALMOST CONSTANT STREAM TO TRACK DOWN THE LATEST RUMORS AND TO OBTAIN BACK-GROUND INFORMATION.
6. AT THIS POINT, WE DON'T KNOW WHEN THE MINISTRY WILL BE

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BACK IN OPERATION AGAIN, BUT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM RELIABLE

SOURCES THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME INTERNAL SCUFFLING TAKING PLACE.

7. YESTERDAY, (TUESDAY) ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS, THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO NAME TEGEGNE YETESHAWORK, VICE MINISTER OF PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS AND AUTHOR OF FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL TITLED "SPEAKING OUT" (SEE ADDIS USINFO TUESDAY, MARCH 5), AS MINISTER OF INFORMATION. NAMING OF TEGEGNE, HOWEVER, WAS BLOCKED BY MEMBERS OF ETHIOPIAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION (EJA), WHO MET WITH PM AND SAID IF TEGEGNE WAS GIVEN TOP SLOT, JOURNALISTS WOULD GO ON STRIKE.

8. ALTHOUGH TEGEGNE IS ABLE JOURNALIST AND HAS AT VARIOUS TIMES CALLED FOR MORE LIBERAL PRESS, HE WAS TOO CLOSELY ALLIED WITH FORMER MINISTER OF INFO, DR. TESFAYE GEBRE-EGZY, WHO WAS UNIVERSALLY HATED BY MEMBERS OF FOURTH ESTATE. PRESS CORPS FEELS TEGEGNE WENT ALONG WITH TESFAYE'S REPRESSIVE MEASURES AND WAS ALSO INVOLVED IN SOME OF TESFAYE'S SHADY FINANCIAL DEALS.

9. IT LOOKS NOW, AS IF TEGEGNE IS OUT OF THE RUNNING.(BUT HE IS NOTORIOUSLY GOOD IN-FIGHTER AND CAN NEVER BE COUNTED COMPLETELY OUT.

10. MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT IS THAT EJA, WHICH WAS PREVIOUSLY AN ORGANIZATION IN NAME ONLY, IS NOW SHOWING SURPRISING MUSCLE. IN ADDITION TO BLOCKING TEGEGNE'S APPOINTMENT, EJA REPRESENTATIVES ALSO MET WITH THE NEW PM YESTERDAY TO "DEMAND" A RELAXTION OF PRESS CENSORSHIP, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRESS LAW.

11. A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE IN THE OFFICIAL ENGLISH LANGAUGE DAILY ETHIOPIAN HERALD (WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6) STATED THAT THE NEW PM TOLD REPS OF THE EJA THAT HE "IN PRINCIPLE AGREES TO GIVE THE NATION A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE PRESS THAT TELLS ALL THE TRUTH AND ECHOES THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE..." (THE APPEARANCE OF THE ARTICLE IN THE HERALD IS A STRONG INDICATION CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS RAPIDLY MOVING IN THIS DIRECTION).

12. STORY FURTHER STATES THAT EJA OUTLINED "THE DAMAGE WROUGHT BY A MUZZLED MAS MEDIA TO THE NATION NOTING THAT THEIR CONSCIENCE HAS BEEN SICKENED BY THE DISSERVICE THE ETHIOPIAN PRESS, RADIO AND TV HAD DONE IN THE PAST..."

13. THE EJA ALSO CALLED FOR "TEMPORARY GUIDELINES" DECLARING

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS UNTIL DETAILS OF A NEW PRESS LAW CAN BE WORKED OUT.

14. THE HERALD QUOTED THE NEW PM AS SAYING THE NEW CABINET WILL "TRY TO CLOSE THE CREDIBILITY GAP BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT AND THAT THE PRESS WILL HAVE TO PRESENT THE TRUE PICTURE OF THINGS ON BOTH SIDES..."

COMMENT

AS POINTED OUT ABOVE, THE ETHIOPIAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION UP UNTIL NOW HAS BEEN A PRACTICALLY INACTIVE ORGANIZATION. MEETINGS HAVE BEEN FEW AND FAR BETWEEN, MEMBERSHIP IS SMALL AND EVEN "ACTIVE" MEMBERS RARELY PAY THEIR DUES, OR IF THEY DO, DON'T PAY THEM ON TIME. EXCEPT FOR A HANDFUL OF YOUNGER MEMBERS, THE EJA MEMBERSHIP CAN BE ACCUSED OF THE SAME APATHY AND NEGLECT THAT THEY ARE CURRENTLY ATTRIBUTING ONLY TO THE MININFO HIERARCHY. THE QUESTION THAT CAN BE REASONBLY ASKED IS "WHERE HAS THE EJA BEEN ALL THIS TIME? AND WHY DIDN'T THEY COME OUT WITH THESE BOLD PRONOUNCEMENTS EARLIER?"

EVEN WHILE DISPLAYING THEIR CURRENT BRAVADO, FEW OF THEM ARE LINING UP PUBLICLY AND VOICING THEIR OPINIONS ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS. IN FACT, THEY HAVE DISPLAYED MORE FEAR OF TAKING AN OUTSPOKEN STANCE IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS THAN WAS PREVIOUSLY THE CASE. THE IMPRESSION IS THAT UNTIL THEY ARE ON FIRM GROUND AND TEGEGNE IS SAFELY TUCKED AWAY, THEY ARE GOING TO SEE WHERE THE CHIPS FALL BEFORE COMMITTING THEMSELVES. THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT MANY OF THEM, DESPITE PUBLIC EJA DECLARATIONS, ARE PROTEGES OF DR. TESFAYE AND TEGEGNE. THIS GROUP'S NEWLY FOUND "PATRIOTISM" IS CERTAINLY QUESTIONABLE.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE EJA, ALONG WITH THE ARMED FORCES,
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THE TEACHERS AND OTHER GROUPS, HAS GONE INTO THE PAMPHLET BUSINESS AND IS CURRENTLY DISTRIBUTING A "BIOGRAPHICAL" PAMPHLET ON TEGEGNE DESCRIBING HIS CORRUPTNESS, CITING SPECIFIC INSTANCES OF HOW HE HAS ENRICHED HIMSELF BY USING HIS POSITION FOR FINANCIAL GAIN.

THIS PAMPHLET IS SIMILAR TO THE ONE THAT IS CURRENTLY BEING CIRCULATED BY GROUPS WHO ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE NEW PRIME MINISTER AND CONTAIN MANY OF THE SAME REVELATIONS.
ROSS

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